

Narrating the German Loss: Small Histories and the Historiography of Fascist Violence.

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in the Department of Art.

Chapel Hill  
2007

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## ABSTRACT

Andrew Hennlich: Narrating the German Loss: Small Histories and the Historiography of Fascist Violence.

(Under the direction of Carol Mavor)

Witness is the primary form of documenting histories of Fascist violence. Despite the inherent problems associated with witnessing, it incorporates itself into purportedly objective and scientific histories. Responding to Hayden White's claim that all histories are narrative in structure, my thesis interrogates two artist's works- W.G. Sebald's last novel *Austerlitz* and Christian Boltanski's *Resistance*. Each project examines the relationships between witness, photography and archives, constructing what Boltanski terms "small histories" – personal memories, unique to the individual making up an important aspect of their identity, falling outside of "objective" histories. Sebald and Boltanski's narratives become exemplars of a literary history, supplementing the gaps within history writing, making "small histories" an essential part of historiography. Writing histories of Fascist violence in this way counters the ideological and overwhelming images of the Holocaust. Instead their images preserve a trace of the individual's life rather than death, narrating histories that are self-reflexive and open.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank to Dr. Mary Sheriff and Dr. Pika Ghosh for their support in completing my thesis work over the past twelve months. Thanks to Kevin Parker and Richard Langston whose insight and advice proved invaluable towards crafting my writing. A special thank you to Carol Mavor whose time, devotion and support made the completion of this thesis possible.

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## Narrating the German Loss: Small Histories and the Historiography of Fascist Violence.

Just as photography claims the real, so does history. Both history and photography problematically claim to be objective, fixed and truthful. Constructing itself as a documentary media that purports access to the truth through its reproductive capabilities, the realism photography claims is a perfect reflection of the goals of official histories whose claim to scientific methodologies constructs themselves as fixed, objective, and truthful. This argument, perhaps expressed most eloquently by Hayden White, reveals the untenable relations between history and science.

French semiologist Roland Barthes's famous and final text *Camera Lucida* provides a profound analysis of the function of the photograph, how it is read, and more significantly how one is touched by and touches them. *Camera Lucida* opens with an investigation into the nature of photography, Barthes gazing longingly into the eyes of Napoleon's youngest brother, seeing "the thing that has been."<sup>1</sup> The photograph, at once personal and referential to a grand history pricks Barthes; he is amazed at the familial relations, knowing these were the eyes that witnessed the emperor. The photograph despite its historical status becomes tender, like the Winter Garden photograph of Barthes mother; he does not reproduce it, or perhaps it cannot be reproduced. For Barthes photography can be thought of as both intensely personal, having *punctum* pricking or bruising ones consciousness, and laden with public and political ideology, mirroring the politics of historicism.

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<sup>1</sup>Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 3.

French installation artist Christian Boltanski and German novelist W.G. Sebald's texts refer to one of the most documented events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Holocaust. Both artists' birth in 1944 gives them a unique perspective looking back on the Holocaust as it impacted the makeup of their youth in post-war Europe. Revealing the instability and problems of witness in the production of objective histories, both Sebald and Boltanski use the imagery of eyes, reflective of those eyes of Napoleon's brother charged with witnessing to promote the existence of small memories, telling stories rather than writing histories. Boltanski's "small memories" personal and fleeting things, like a family story, or joke hold the identity of the individual for him. Boltanski's small memory can be thought of as similar to Barthes notion of the biographeme, arguing that the photograph holds within it a small biographical portion of the individual.<sup>2</sup> The small memory is also similar to queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's notion of weak theory, a type of criticism that avoids totalizing gestures, or systematic approaches.<sup>3</sup> Small memories focus on every day life instead of the fixed, legal finality of death, distinguishing the individual from the dominant narratives that condition and construct identity (nationalism, the capitalist ethic, religion, heteronormativity, etc). Boltanski's small memories represent a mode of historical inquiry that resists the ideologizing and isolating forces of official histories, allowing stories not heard and potentially not historical to be told.

The Holocaust documented in tomes of films and photographs of emaciated, tortured and dead bodies desensitize and are unable to effectively communicate the atrocities in any way. Small memories of the Holocaust contain within them the personal

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<sup>2</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 30.

<sup>3</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, "Feeling Brown, Feeling Down: Latina Affect, the Performativity of Race, and the Depressive Position," *Signs*, 31.3 (Spring, 2006), 677.

and possess the capability of puncturing the reader, raising their consciousness and affecting them in such ways that inscribed and official histories cannot, despite their non-historical structure. Weaving together Boltanski's *Resistance* along with Sebald's *Austerlitz*, and the criticism of Roland Barthes and historian Hayden White, whose emphasis on the ways in which the photograph and literature are constructed, can illuminate the potential for a small memory to provide a way of moving beyond or outside those official ones. These thinkers reveal a tactical aesthetics that not only criticize but also attempt to outmaneuver the totalizing aspects of Holocaust histories. These tactics touch the viewer, impacting them and in doing so write a narrative history embracing life within the tender and personal rather than an emphasis on the finality of their death.<sup>4</sup> This emphasis on tactics, or a weak theory to counter official memories, is effaced not only in the use of eyes, whose reference to witnessing and photography make an essential analysis of historicism. Additionally, Sebald and Boltanski's work speaks on the relationship between architecture and heirlooms playing with official and personal memories, as well as the function of the witness undermining the realism of photography. They offer aesthetic works as strong examples of artistic production that reclaim and address the narrative approach of history writing. By resurrecting small memories, both artists construct discourses that acknowledge and play with history as narrative, speaking about the Holocaust while acknowledging the unspeakable.

The small history revealed by Boltanski in *Resistance* (fig. 1, 1993) is an installation of a series photographs of eyes, appropriated from Gestapo photographs of the *Rote Kapelle*, a group of Marxist resisters. Boltanski placed the images on the interior and exterior of the Haus der Kunst in Munich, limiting the image to a zone that stretches

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<sup>4</sup>For a concise definition of the tactic see Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*.



across the individual's face representing only the top of the nose and eyes in a grainy black and white photograph. Rephotographing the images left them with a blurred appearance, further reducing the clarity with which they could be ascertained. This lack of clarity is reflected in the politics of the *Rote Kapelle* whose Socialist beliefs were met with disavowal in West Germany after the war creating a disjuncture in post-War ideologies (anti-Nazism and Capitalist ideologies of the West).<sup>5</sup> *Resistance* exposes the instability in writing history. Constantly inside and out at the same time it questions witness, its truthfulness, and its ability to be obfuscated. Boltanski interrogates victim and guilt, French and German, Marxist and capitalist, West and East, past and present. In the simple gesture of rephotographing a series of mug shots Boltanski, exposes the problems inherent in representing histories that claim to be true. Fiction suits Boltanski well, it allows for an incredible liberation of the viewers to insert their own memory or identity into the work. *Resistance* does not stop at a mere attempt at representing violence of the Nazi regime; it speaks to the question of bearing witness, asking us what is at stake in representing or writing other tragedies.

*Austerlitz*, W.G. Sebald's final novel holds within its narrative several small memories of the Holocaust as well, most presently felt in a photograph of the main character. Sebald reproduces a photograph of Austerlitz at the age of four dressed in a dramatic snow-white gown and knee length trousers (fig. 2). The young boy clutching a hat with a matching fur edged cape peers out into the distance of a flat landscape towards his mother just before she is to take him to a costume ball. Austerlitz's photo taken months before he is sent to Wales on a Kindertransport *represents* absences experienced in the Holocaust without giving a direct and violent image like representing a tortured

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<sup>5</sup>Heather Cameron, "Photography and the Surveillance Society," Accessed 3/4/06.

and dead body would. Instead of representing the death of a victim, Sebald's text derives meaning through the relationship between image and text, producing a complex and developing narrative of both Austerlitz and his mother. Austerlitz's photo gives the reader the same experience Barthes describes viewing Napoleon's brother. In the picture of Austerlitz as a child, he sees for us the eyes of his mother.<sup>6</sup> Sebald's tactic of representing the mother is revealed to the reader in a wave of emotions, brought along with Austerlitz reliving his childhood experiences through the photographic. This witnessing of the eyes of Austerlitz as a young boy, like Boltanski's *Resistance*, and Barthes's witnessing of Napoleon's brother provides an entrance point into dispersed memories. The eyes, like a camera provide a sense of having been there for the viewer/reader. The photograph of Austerlitz as a child becomes a vessel for his personal memories of displaced childhood, witnessing himself as a forgotten part of his own history, but also is the seed to a much larger memory in its representation of the Holocaust.

The search for personal histories as a way to narrate the Holocaust is precisely what Sebald does throughout *Austerlitz*. *Austerlitz* tells the tale of a European Jewish intellectual forced into exile as a young boy from his native Czechoslovakia by his parents at the outbreak of World War II. Austerlitz arrives in Wales to be raised by a stern Methodist minister, only learning his Czech identity as an adolescent in boarding school. The unnamed narrator retelling a series of stories told to him by Austerlitz, encountering him in Brussels, reveals Austerlitz's search to find his parents and to recover a narrative of his Czech identity. Austerlitz, himself an art historian, whose scholarly affiliations are mysterious, is engrossed in completing a manuscript on

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<sup>6</sup>Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 3.

European architecture. His profession aids the reader on a search through Europe going to Prague and Paris in an attempt to find his parents, journeying through dispersed histories and in doing so, randomly uncovers the histories of fortress architecture, natural history museums, and the legacy of Belgian colonialism, all serving as examples of the dispersed and forgotten histories of Europe.

Sebald's lengthy writing gives the reader a sense of getting lost in time, having no sense of the duration that passed while reading the text. The novel reflects this as Austerlitz relates his stories to the narrator, written often without punctuation or paragraph break for pages. Writing with such dense material and in a non-linear fashion gives the reader the sensation of drifting along with the narrator between the narratives of Austerlitz's life, historical, and art historical examinations of European history and architecture, and philosophic investigations of memory, witness, and loss, making the text at once hollow (in its lack of emphasis and refusal to fully represent the Holocaust) and overflowing with meaning. Sebald's narrative creates a unique experience each time the reader passes through the text, often only grasping parts of the narrative as Sebald delivers lengthy treatises to the reader. Sebald's use of the photographic becomes essential to the novel providing the structure to the narrative. The photograph provides a concrete image of Austerlitz's wandering searches for the reader. Passing through the numerous types of writing, the appearance of the photographic image punctures the flow of the narrative giving a glimpse at historicity often only to deny it, the photograph is often not what it seems, providing directly the same sense of *punctum* that draws Barthes to a wide range of photographs. Photographs, diagrams and engravings appear throughout

the novel both attempting to hold a kernel of truth and yet manipulate the honesty of the narrative.

Before the narrator introduces Austerlitz to the reader we are met with two pairs of eyes- those of an owl and a raccoon- and a second pair of eyes of an artist and the philosopher Wittgenstein, providing a sense of the gaze that is at once natural and cultural (fig.3). The unnamed narrator reminds us that “the fixed, inquiring gaze found in certain painters and philosophers who seek to penetrate the darkness by means of looking and thinking.”<sup>7</sup> The nocturama, an inversion of historicism, retreats into the darkness to look rather than illuminating, is also the method for the production of a photograph, going into the darkness to produce the image. This confusing narrative often constructed through the optic, reveals the relations of vision to the production of witness and the construction narratives where previously there have been none.

Like the nocturama, Boltanski’s cropped, grainy, black and white bands become a series of eyes that peer continually out at the viewers of the installation but also cast their gaze upon individuals walking past the museum. This forces those who navigate the space where the museum is situated to confront the eyes in front of the building as well as the history of the building itself. By repositioning the gaze both inwardly and outwardly on the cultural institutions of the country, Boltanski reinvents the notion of *Kritik*, or the German tradition of criticism as praxis. This *Kritik* of German narratives, focused outwardly to interrogate the relation of the building to public memory, and inwardly questioning the relations between museum, archive, history and memory, points out that forgetting is an active process, intentionally leaving something out to produce a new narrative out of dominant ideologies. Despite this confrontation, the massive building of

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<sup>7</sup>W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 5.

the Haus der Kunst dwarfs the gazing eyes of Boltanski's appropriated photographs: the grey stone columns and stairs serve as reminders of the monumental and totemic history (both in a general and artistic sense, playing with narratives of World War II and art history) that compromised those represented in the photographs. It is in the juxtaposition of these two divergent histories, that meaning emerges from Boltanski's project, questioning the relations of monuments, large histories and those aspects of history that are forgotten or repressed.

Heather Cameron argues that cropped eyes of *Resistance* become significant; inverting the black box usually placed over the eyes to protect one's identity.<sup>8</sup> The traditional codes of photography used to protect and conceal the individual for their own privacy now hail both those moving past the museum and those inside out of their anonymity, instead of veiling they confront. Boltanski's tactics interrogate photography as representation, through appropriation the origins of the image are difficult to establish. Keenly aware of Barthes' thinking on both photography and ideology in contemporary culture, Boltanski resists an ideologized shock photo, neglecting to show the body in full removes the implied violence of the mug shot.

This technique, playing with representations of criminality in the media, also reminds us of the hyper-mediatization that surrounds tragedy in contemporary culture. Boltanski's pessimistic outlook on the construction of contemporary society leads him, like several historians, to see the Holocaust as a breaking point in history viewing Bosnia, Rwanda, the atom bomb, AIDS and pollution as examples that the world has become

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<sup>8</sup>Heather Cameron, "Photography and the Surveillance Society."

progressively worse since World War II.<sup>9</sup> While Boltanski's ahistorical approach to political instability, and global health/environmental concerns are seemingly problematic, refusing to deal with the significant political concerns around each issue, it does reveal the structure of post-Holocaust era narratives, always figuring tragedy through the lens of the Holocaust.<sup>10</sup> The victim's eyes in Boltanski's *Resistance* remind us of the ubiquity of photography bearing witness to global tragedy, especially considering the plethora of photographic documentation surrounding the Holocaust. The play between censorship of the shocking image and the profundity of the act of witnessing are exposed Boltanski's *Resistance*.

Boltanski upsets the traditional authorial role, as viewers we are asked to look along with the Gestapo police who took the pictures, and are met with the gazes of the resistance members whose immanent death is forthcoming. This view resists the image of the hero as liberator for both a German audience (propped up by the airlifts and Marshall Plan), and French audience (who were liberated by American and British forces), confusing traditional notions of heroism, as the heroes are German. These images are not the triumphant soldiers marching to Paris, or taking Berlin, but are confined images of eyes telling different stories of World War II. The anti-heroic, and somber stance of the work changes the way the Holocaust is written, resisting the heroic freedom fighter narrative so frequently figured in a discourse common to the United States.

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<sup>9</sup> Tamar Garb, "Tamar Garb in Conversation With Christian Boltanski," in *Christian Boltanski*, ed. Tamar Garb, Donald Kuspit and Didier Semin, (London: Phaidon Press. 1997), 22.

<sup>10</sup> This historical trope is not only present in the ways in which genocides today are compared to the tragedy of the Holocaust, but further still from a legal model. The Nuremberg trials provided a model by which the UN war crimes tribunals for both Bosnia and Rwanda were founded upon, creating a precedent by which genocide is handled.

Limiting the photograph to the eyes duplicates vision for the viewer, witnessed through a German soldier and a French Jew, *Resistance* creates an unstable witness. The duplicitous witness destabilizes not only photography but also history. As a viewer we cannot be sure from what perspective these images are taken, nor can we be confident of their truthfulness (especially considering Boltanski's *oeuvre* often appropriating images whose origin may not relate to the context he places them in). By rephotographing the image, they are removed from their original shock, and placed into the context of a new hybrid witness of the Gestapo soldier, Boltanski, and the installation viewer.

The instability of witness and the ability of the novelist or historian, to reappropriate images to construct new narratives are shown by Austerlitz in his pastime of constantly rearranging photographs at the kitchen table tirelessly sometimes removing them to create new narratives. The context of the photograph changes wildly when appropriated differently by a Nazi officer (the Gestapo soldiers) or by a French Jew (Boltanski). In each context the image implies a different narrative, one of impending death, and the other an image of a potential hero, those who fought to save the Jews risking their own life. The unstable photograph makes the viewer an uneasy witness, not knowing which photographer to which they should identify the image with (providing a critique on authorship at the same time), or what should they be seeing. This split in artistic production creates a plethora of narratives dependant on each layer of witness, some presumed to be good, and some presumed to be evil, making history untenable and difficult for the viewer to address in a stable, linear paradigm.

Boltanski's eyes constructed through multiple layers of mediation; closely mirror the stories Vera, a neighbor of Austerlitz's parents told. Vera, who witnessed the actions

of the Nazi regime in *Austerlitz*, reveals the photograph of Austerlitz as a young child, but also tells him stories of witnessing the Nazi rallies and the eventual Nazi occupation of Prague. The stories Vera tells Austerlitz in an attempt to recover his childhood are of an absence, the memorable story of a Nazi rally and the screaming masses, was originally told to Vera from Maximilian, Austerlitz's father (also Sebald's middle name, Sebald preferred to be called Max a shortened version of Maximilian), who in turn witnessed the rally through watching Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*. Maximilian describes the famous opening of the film where Hitler's plane descends upon Munich emerging from the clouds.<sup>11</sup> The closest *Austerlitz* comes to representing the Holocaust is in this scene constructed through several layers of witness. Vera's story is only experienced through a retelling of an original experience mediated through film; in much the same way we as readers receive the narrative through a retelling of Austerlitz's experiences. This retelling, typical of the historicization of the Holocaust is often accomplished through personal memoir, despite the primary witnesses' access to the historical event, its entry into discourse changes and manipulates the telling of the event, placing it within a specific narrative context, which is often read as history.

Sebald's texts as an example of historical criticism, do not write stable narratives of World War II. Resisting official histories, which frequently reduce Germany and its citizens to an exemplar of aggression and associate them with the Holocaust, Sebald's novel makes it possible to construct narratives that consider the destruction experienced by Germans in World War II. Writing histories that seek to reveal these narratives allows groups such as the *Rote Kapelle* to emerge. The problematic nature of removing the *Rote Kapelle* from German history is that it denies a memory of National Socialism that resists

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<sup>11</sup>W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 169.



Fascism, revealing the ideological relations of historiography and Cold War politics.<sup>12</sup> Sebald's construction of Holocaust writing (like Boltanski's work it is implied but not immediately palpable) allows stories to be told of the loss of family members, the destruction of homes, and traumas experienced by German-Jewish families. The lack of focus on Germany in *Austerlitz* allows for the actions of the Nazi's to be seen in a wider context, against the actions of violence experienced by all parties involved in World War II, including those German citizens who were bombed, and those who resisted the Nazi regime. Sebald's narrative speaks of the Holocaust, but allows the narrative to not be just a question of the extermination of Jews, but rather his meandering historical searches reveal several narratives of violence and destruction throughout Europe creating a multitude of wartime narratives.

Sebald's eyes natural and historical, stable and unstable juxtapose the personal and historical in his use of the photographic; questioning the presumed authority of the photograph as a historical document. Boltanski also produces narratives that undermine the truth of the photograph and history playing between the two. These tactics of representation reveal a photograph whose relationship with literature avoids representing the Holocaust with images that are so sensationalized that meaning becomes lost. Despite its presumed historical purpose and accuracy, the photo is often used to memorialize the

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<sup>12</sup>The suppression of memory of the *Rote Kapelle* was a very active one for West Germany. The federal government actively commemorated the resistance, creating a national holiday and linking the majority of cultural memory of those who resisted, with the assassination plot of Hitler. However the *Rote Kapelle* was removed from this national narrative. Subsequently, since reunification, East German monuments and holidays have been erased (along with much of the memorial culture of East Germans) in favor of celebrating the resistance on the anniversary of the assassination attempt. Even more concertedly the West German government took great lengths to disenfranchise Socialists and Marxists in the post-War context including banning the German Communist Party in 1956, and not allowing Socialists who were victimized by the Holocaust to be able to receive any reparations. For scholars like Rebecca Comay this disavowal of the *Rote Kapelle* caused Germany to search for new heroes in the resistance that was compatible with the politics of the Cold War. See: Rebeca Comay, "Facing History/ Memories of Resistance: Boltanski, Benjamin and the Aura of Fascist Architecture," *Alphabet City*, 4/5: (1995).

fleeting and forgotten aspects in the grand narratives of history. The juxtaposition between the documentary photography and the narrative of the text often play with the authority of the photograph as a historical document. Austerlitz's actions make this apparent, when the narrator in one of several lengthy evenings spent with Austerlitz in his home, finds Austerlitz seated at his grey table tirelessly rearranging photographs, slowly examining them and then placing them in a new order according to a new logic that he developed until exhausted from "thinking and remembering".<sup>13</sup> Austerlitz's "game of patience," as the narrator describes his photographic obsession, reveals the construction of the photograph as a historical narrative, as one would find in any literary text. Through organizing principles, Austerlitz gives the same series of photographs different outcomes. Photography supports the narrative but does not give authority to Sebald's writing, falling within the same narrative structure that historical writing does. Instead its self-awareness of the literary aspects of history writing constructs the photograph as a small memory supporting a writing of history focusing on the personal and dispersed qualities of the novel.

White is often challenged with the claim that the Holocaust is difficult to situate within his historiographical remarks. While it may seem that his claim that historical writing is literary in nature supports Holocaust denial, White is not denying the Holocaust, he challenges its representations, to reveal how the Holocaust is understood as a historical event. It is not so much a question of did the Holocaust take place or not, but a question that focuses on the ways in which it is contextualized often through personal narrative, memory and memoir. These devices, profoundly literary, are the primary ways in which the Holocaust is written, making the truth of their constructions subjective,

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<sup>13</sup>W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 119.

given over to personal ideology and memory. Austerlitz's insistence on restructuring photographs into narratives seems reminiscent of White's formalism, emphasizing an investigation of the structure of literature and the ways its form impact its content. White reveals the writing of history to be literary in its form.<sup>14</sup>

In a brief lecture, "Historical Discourse and Literary Writing," emphasizing a close read of the writing of Holocaust survivor Primo Levi, White argues precisely that the production of history is indebted to the literary mode and ultimately narrativel in structure. White contends that modernity brought about changes in approaches to literature, creating a divide between history and literature. Interested in scientific methods, history established literature as its "double".<sup>15</sup> While historical discourse after the 19<sup>th</sup> century possessed a drive to separate itself from literary forms, several examples of literary modes of production (Baudelaire, Proust, etc.) became interested in producing a "real world", a literary mode of production that reflected the social conditions of everyday life.<sup>16</sup> Writing the Holocaust becomes important to White's investigation as it most clearly illuminates the primary way history is constructed. Historical writing produced through a transformation of eyewitness testimonial, much like the photographic referent for Barthes, claims truth by having been there. Writers like Levi, or Anne Frank

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<sup>14</sup> White is interested in Barthes' work in both *Mythologies*, and "The Discourse of History," showing the production of history to be mythological in its origins, and that its linguistic status cannot hold the truth. Furthermore White turns towards Marxist ideology critique to advance a claim similar to his writing in "Historical Discourse and Literary Writing," that the production of discourse is always done through a particular ideology, and finally interested in the Hermeneutic methodology of Ricoeur who shows the methods of reading a novel and history to be the same. By examining these three dominant modes of theoretical inquiry, White is able to show from several perspectives the ways that history and historiography are always constructed through a literary mode. See White's Hayden White, "Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory," in: *The Content of the Form*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1987).

<sup>15</sup> Hayden White, "Historical Discourse and Literary Writing," in *Tropes for the Past*, ed. Kuisma Korhonen, (New York: Rodopi, 2006), 25.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

whose memoirs and autobiographical writings have become a key source of historical meaning for the Holocaust, decode the structures in which the content is held reveal the ways in which history does indeed rely on a literary mode of representation.<sup>17</sup>

White's analysis of Levi's rhetoric focuses on a close reading of *Survival in Auschwitz*. White shows the rhetorical strategies of Levi to be based in a desire to represent facts, but employs rhetoric such that Levi actually represents types, troping, using individuals to stand in for larger categories, to produce a literary gesture of what the experience in Auschwitz was like. White reveals Levi's factual errors but also his use of metaphor in constructing the personal characteristics of those he encountered, universalizing the individual.<sup>18</sup>

Levi's tactics of representation lead White to produce several conclusions about the nature of history. White tells us that the historian must contextualize the eyewitness testimony or the photograph processing it into a narrative. This transformation of data into narratives is always done to serve ideology, constructing history according to the dominant modes of production and political systems at play.<sup>19</sup> Concluding his lecture, White argues that "figuration is a necessary device for characterizing persons for roles in narratives and troping is necessary for making the kinds of connections between events that endow them with plot meaning."<sup>20</sup> It becomes impossible for history to avoid the

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<sup>17</sup>Texts such as Benjamin Wilkomirski's *Fragments* largely regarded to be a pure fabrication of a Holocaust memoir further complicates the notions of truth in witness. In Wilkomirski's case the production of a memoir was completely based on a series of memories that never existed, pointing to the impossibility of ascertaining an objective truth through witness. For a detailed discussion of Wilkomirski's text and the subsequent controversy it produced see Steven Maechler's, *The Wilkomirski Affair: A Study in Biographical Truth*, (New York: Schocken Books, 2001).

<sup>18</sup>Hayden White, "Historical Discourse and Literary Writing," in *Tropes for the Past*, 28, 32.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid. 29-30.

narrative structure that Levi employs. Levi does not write a bad history, rather he becomes an example of the ways all history is a part of the system of language, and by engaging in such a process inevitably falls into the same modes of production that literature uses. However, literature, conscious of its own narrative, holds the capability of creating histories that can undermine narratives that claim to be objective. Boltanski and Sebald's work constantly shifting between the archive and fiction exposes not only the literary mode of writing history, but become those histories that can counter it.

White's interest in the validity of literary production in the writing of history shows the importance of the small memories that exist in Boltanski and Sebald, arguing for their necessity. His essay makes it clear that the production of memories and narratives are often unstable, but does not deny literary and subjective modes of production. Instead Boltanski and Sebald embrace the aesthetic working between personal narratives and official histories, showing the official and "large" histories of the French Resistance, German reparations, and the Allied narratives of heroism as constructions produced out of the various national ideologies that inspired them. They argue instead that "small memories" ones that White's writing insists upon can hold memories and histories of the Holocaust that are just as important, creating a space in which aesthetics can become historical criticism. This relationship both large and personal is exemplified in Barthes's discussion of the image of Napoleon's brother, seeing the larger context of French history implicit in the witnessing of Napoleon, but the incredible personal content that lies in Barthes's own personal amazement over the image.

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<sup>20</sup>Hayden White, "Historical Discourse and Literary Writing," in *Tropes for the Past*, 31.

Jacques Austerlitz's search throughout the pages of *Austerlitz*, reveal the problems inherent in bearing witness and constructing stable narratives of loss. Austerlitz documents his own origins through a complex web of language and translations, out of Sebald's native tongue of German, to his narrator's birth language of Czech, to his complex language of exile, as both Welsh and English at the same time. The translation of the novel through transcriptions of Austerlitz's stories to an unnamed narrator, who then reveals the story to the reader, creates another filter of the narration to its source. Given these constant webs of translation that situate Austerlitz, his family, the narrator and the reader to each other, one cannot help but to be reminded by Walter Benjamin's claim in "The Task of the Translator." Benjamin argues that the task of translation produces not a faithful copy, but that the translation bears a "kinship" to the text.<sup>21</sup> This kinship relates not only to the vast number of languages that the text moves through but also the vast number of personal positions (Welsh/British, British/German, Czech/German) woven between the characters and even between the individual subjects and their own relation to their memories in the text. Constantly naming and renaming, knowing and forgetting, the vast number of translations, it would seem leads Austerlitz during his voyage back to his native Czechoslovakia feeling at once familiar yet alienated from his home, to conclude, "I had no place in reality...I could not imagine who or what I was."<sup>22</sup> Austerlitz's culture of placelessness and translations produce a split and unstable subject, finding himself within a plethora of histories and narratives in his attempts to unmask his origins.

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<sup>21</sup>Walter Benjamin, "Task of the Translator," in *Illuminations*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 74.

<sup>22</sup>W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 185.

Austerlitz, who in exile loses the trauma he attempts to recover, is in effect a member of those victimized, but at the same time his British exile places his war experience squarely within a narrative of Allied heroism. His Czech memories of trauma and loss fade and the dominant British narrative of bravery and triumph into his life, whose air war dominance (which destroyed quite a few German family memories) became the narrative by which Austerlitz experienced the war. Austerlitz's identity further confuses his ability to witness; his Methodist parents changed his name to Dafydd Elias. He only finds out that his name was Jacques Austerlitz when filling out an exam in boarding school, necessitating a piece of paper to remember his original name, which not only denies his familial memories, it in effect trivializes them.<sup>23</sup> Austerlitz's name holds within it several referents to Jewishness, Czech identity, Fred Astaire's original surname, Kafka's diaries, and the Battle of Austerlitz in which Napoleon defeated the Russians.<sup>24</sup> His name becomes reflexive of the structure of the entire novel, containing several referents leading to random historical events, which unfold into larger historical narratives. This scene implies that Austerlitz has forgotten who he was in Czechoslovakia. Exiled as a young boy Austerlitz could not remember, and the loss of an elder generation to preserve these histories caused his Czech small memories to fade, instead his Welsh upbringing persists, creating new narratives. His childhood was held in photographs that he did not have access to, making the *punctum* more potent when Austerlitz discovers them later in life.

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<sup>23</sup>W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 67.

<sup>24</sup>Mark R. McCulloh, *Understanding W.G. Sebald*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 118.

This question of national identity; although displaced in *Austerlitz*, is also of crucial importance to Boltanski. Despite his own national identity as French, Boltanski's installation points to the concealment of two central factors in the writing of German history. First, Boltanski counters the narrative that reduces Germans to perpetrators of the Holocaust. This produces a narrative of Germanness that falls within the context of "official" German history but stands outside traditional histories much in the same way that Austerlitz's national identity is unstable. Representing certain portions of the German populace as resisters points to those within the country that did not succumb to Fascist influence. Additionally, *Resistance* acknowledges and reveals behind the veils of ideology, a national culture outside of the Fascist legacy, allowing the acknowledgement of the philosophical and intellectual tradition that supports the intellectual commitment of German thinkers who did not defend the Fascist legacy.<sup>25</sup> Boltanski's project of removing the aura of Fascism upon the German people is placed within the infrastructure of one of its cultural institutions, the Haus der Kunst, the national museum of art in the Nazi regime. Boltanski employs a tactic that associates Germany and its artistic output not with a rabid nationalism, but with reclaiming architecture and the space within it; whose construction and classicism are referential to the Nazi aesthetic paradigm, revealing a culture of resistance and dissent.<sup>26</sup> The original witnesses to the photographs of the *Rote Kapelle* in *Resistance* are themselves the oppressors, in the form of Gestapo

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<sup>25</sup>Further still, it allows a removal of the aura of Fascism from intellectual work, freeing Germany from its confines within the tragedy of Heidegger, and his association with the Nazi party. This allows for both a discussion of the works of Heidegger as an intellectual contribution to Germany, but also frees the tradition of thinkers (both in the Nietzschean tradition as well as Marxism from inevitably being associated with Nazism or totalitarian Communism.

<sup>26</sup>Hitler laid the foundation stone of the building in a ceremony to declare a national day of art, in which he attempted to make Munich the cultural center of Germany. See Rebeca Comay, "Facing History/ Memories of Resistance: Boltanski, Benjamin and the Aura of Fascist Architecture," *Alphabet City*.



troops. The realization that the authors of the photograph are Nazis plays with our expectations of the image. These images, constructed through complex layers of unstable witnesses confuse narratives between victim and aggressor as well as bystander, compromising the truthfulness of the photograph.

These complex national narratives, always unstable, never clearly belonging to just one narrative or history, are like the photographic in *Austerlitz*, only meaningful once contextualized. Boltanski's photographs often confuse the notions of stability and truth for the viewer. Boltanski's confusing web of appropriations reveals the photograph to be much like how White understands the narrative structure of history. *Resistance* places the photographs into a new narrative showing that even that which is presumed to be an absolute truth is unstable and sometimes untruthful. Boltanski's own beliefs on photography are quite similar stating: "Its very hard to separate the true from the false...I have manipulated the quality of evidence that people assign to photography in order to subvert it, or to show that photography lies—that what it conveys is not reality but a set of cultural codes."<sup>27</sup> Using photography in ways that undermine the truth of the image becomes a way of exposing the presumed authority and objectivity of historical writing, blurring the boundaries between fiction and history, while at the same time showing the impossibility of that telling that history.

*Resistance* seems to be a logical outcome of the thinking of White's understanding of Barthes. White is interested in Barthes work, especially in *Mythologies*, as a means to criticize traditional historicism, attacking "historiography that favored a narrative representation of past events and processes," exposing them as ideological.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Lynn Gumpert, *Christian Boltanski*, (Paris: Flammarion, 1994), 176.

Barthes ability to dissect the ways in which something as simple as toys or a recipe in a cooking magazine, serves a particular class interest similar to Boltanski's ability to show the writing of Nazi Germany as a history that employs ideological narratives. The gaze of these individuals addresses the tropes, concepts or words which stand in or act as a metaphor for a larger idea such as the Holocaust, in which both insiders and outsiders (making use of both the inside and outside of the museum all the more potent) of Germany address the Holocaust.

Boltanski's decision to crop the photograph, which like any other archival piece of data needs to be manipulated via tropes and metaphors to be placed into a historical context, is a literary mode telling history with vastly different consequences. Boltanski's aesthetic decision goes beyond an emphasis on the eyes as design; they function as counter-memory in the same way that Sebald is looking to preserve the "small memories" of the families that have been destroyed in the Holocaust.

At one level the cropping denies the body, refusing to make the images a direct referent to death, like the image of the condemned man in Barthes' *Camera Lucida*. Barthes discusses the photograph of Lewis Payne, the man charged with assassinating the Secretary of State W.H. Seward, just moments before he was to be executed. Just as the eyes of the *Rote Kapelle* members exist just before their execution, as having an inevitable feeling of death. The photograph (fig. 4) of a man in shackles leaning up against his cell wall gazing vacantly out into space, produces an uneasy tension for Barthes, like the subject, we know he will soon die. Barthes writes: "*he is going to die...this will be and this has been*; I observe with horror an anterior future of which

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<sup>28</sup>Hayden White, "Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory," *The Content of the Form*, 35.

death is the stake.”<sup>29</sup> The photograph in Barthes’s understanding is always wrought with the inevitability of death; it is always an image that has passed. Viewing the photograph of Payne, a complex reading for Barthes who is struck by the young man’s handsome physique, imbuing the image with an erotic desire, makes the *punctum* all the more painful, leaving Barthes with a much more concrete understanding of death. The young man will briefly be executed, and death will be his story (as his life culminates in folly and subsequent execution). Boltanski resists the violent and deathly image, confining the body to the eyes only, refiguring both the act of taking the photograph, and bearing witness.

Boltanski’s images, by virtue of their cropping are a duplicitous, faceless series. Drawing from the thinking of Benjamin, Rebeca Comay (a historian of continental philosophy) argues that this reproducible series of images references the anonymity of the corpses at concentration camps, and the consumer image endlessly repeated, creating an interchangeable subject.<sup>30</sup> While its reproducibility is enticing in the fact that the photograph can be assumed to speak for all, it is troubling in that it eclipses the individuality of the figures. A similar problem occurs in *Austerlitz* when individuals scrawl their names and place of origin upon the limestone walls of a Russian fortress built three years before the socialist revolution, and reclaimed by the Nazis in hopes that they would be saved from anonymity and interchangeability.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 96.

<sup>30</sup>Rebeca Comay, “Facing History/Memories of Resistance: Boltanski, Benjamin and the Aura of Fascist Architecture,” *Alphabet City*, 43.

<sup>31</sup>W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 298.

Architecture creates a tension in a reading of Sebald and Boltanski together, it is at once large, the official building of the Haus Der Kunst or the archive, yet small, holding the memories of the photographic or those names upon limestone. The use of architecture supports the politics of the photography in these two artists' works, playing at once between truth and fiction. Sebald, at the beginning of *Austerlitz*, immediately plays with the intersections of narrative and historical texts through his investigation of architectural history. Austerlitz discusses with the narrator the history of Brussels' landmarks, revealing that these landmarks were built at the time of Belgium's expanding colonial project, the capital generated from colonialism making the architecture possible.<sup>32</sup> The architecture of a Brussels train station becomes the small seed that resides within the shell of colonialism. Austerlitz tells the narrator of a small yellowish patch of land, and its people's optimism that sparked a long trend of imperialism and dominance on the African continent.<sup>33</sup>

This model of a seed or kernel held within a shell comes from Nicholas Abraham's psychoanalytic model in which he reveals Freud's notion of agency as a shell around a kernel, which imbues the shell with meaning.<sup>34</sup> Without delving into psychoanalytic specifics of Abraham's model, it becomes a potent way for thinking about how both Boltanski and Sebald represent the Holocaust, which exists as the shell of the kernels of both their artistic statements. Austerlitz's discussion of colonialism uses the kernel, a map or train station, to reveal the colonial relations that made it possible; it is

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<sup>32</sup>W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 9.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup>Nicholas Abraham, "Conceptual Renewal of Psychoanalysis," in *The Shell and the Kernel*, ed. Nicholas T. Rand, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 80.

the small discovery, which leads the narrator into a bigger event. However, it works both ways for these artists as their works become shells in which a kernel of loss, mourning and destruction experienced through the Holocaust can be found.

Austerlitz's statement, enriched with diagrams of the fortresses, reveals one of the problems with historicizing, mainly the naturalization of history. Despite the economic relationship between colonialism and the history of architecture their relations are veiled, unwilling to discuss the capital that allowed the construction of those buildings, only the monumentality and the aesthetic achievements of Brussels persist.

Concealed relations between the driving forces in history become even more nuanced in the investigation of Austerlitz's own personal past, which inevitably dovetails with a discussion of the Holocaust. Sebald's discussion verges between personal memory in images like Austerlitz's boyhood photograph, and architectural history (revealed through sites that are built, and reclaimed). Diagrams of dodecagon fortress architecture, reproduced in the original engravings with ornate detail to the star pattern of its architecture at the beginning of the novel appear alongside an explanation for their construction in the colonial era in Belgium (fig. 5).<sup>35</sup> In this way the archive becomes a potent force for history writing. Throughout the novel it is the discovery of random charts, letters, photographs that take the reader from the formal structure of Belgian architecture to a history of colonialism. It is similar images and their relations to the text that construct and examine two types of histories of the Holocaust, one official that recasts and reshapes other histories, and a personal more nuanced one.

Architecture, Austerlitz's specialty and personal interest, shares a relationship with the theme of eyes as vessels that hold histories within them; both revealing the

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<sup>35</sup>W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 15.

Holocaust, but avoiding a spectacle of the terror within them. Within the several architectural diagrams of Russian fortresses reproduced in the novel, later to be used as concentration camps and Wehrmacht command posts, Austerlitz's colleague reveals that the 30,000 people who died "lie under a field of oats a hundred meters outside the walls."<sup>36</sup> This image of barbed wire fences and surveillance towers decaying beneath a field of wheat is reminiscent of Alan Resnais's *Night and Fog* presenting still images of the concentration camps in Germany overtaken by grass, slipping from memory, but at the same time representing them in this state avoids the emotionally charged rhetoric that comes with the camp footage at the time of liberation (not only in the images of death and emaciation, but in the national narratives of liberation). Sebald writes: "We try to reproduce the reality, but the harder we try, the more we find the pictures that make up the stock-in-trade of the spectacle of history forcing themselves upon us."<sup>37</sup> To resist the spectacle of the death camp and its forgotten dead at the hands of memorial culture; which constructs a history as singular removing the individual, showing only the group, Sebald not only writes small histories, but plays with large ones as well, making the relationship between private and national unclear. The presence of the individual insists upon a personal narrative in a context where monumental architecture once stood.

Boltanski's project is also concerned with architecture's relation to historical narration, placing photos of individuals outside a building that stood for the strength of the Nazi state and the suppression of the individual, produces narratives that counter the totalizing claims of Germans as perpetrators of the Holocaust. Placing the eyes on the exterior and interior of the building not only interrogates that history but also reclaims

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<sup>36</sup>W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 298.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid*, 71.

that space by interrogating its structures and histories, creating a self-reflexive installation within the museum.

Writing about Boltanski's early work where he used vitrines to contain trace aspects from his life, curator Didier Semin argues that this invocation of the museum involves death. The museum functions like a cemetery allowing these documents to die, banished from memory.<sup>38</sup> This sentiment is heightened in *Resistance* by virtue of the installation being placed on the Haus der Kunst, constructed as Hitler's house of culture, linking the institution with Fascist propaganda. By turning its contents out either through critique of the archive in *Austerlitz* or through an inversion taking the photographic and moving it to the outside of the institution, the kernel reimbues and changes the meaning of the shell revealing the building's meaning as a site of memory, political violence and trauma. This relationship between architecture and violence throughout both artists' works creates a notion of the Holocaust where previously the shell eclipsed the kernel of meaning.

The Haus der Kunst seems to be part of the large history, its totemic stature, and bulky structure immediately recalls its Fascist past. Critiquing it however can imbue the imposing façade with a series of small memories. The heirlooms contained within the home, become small memories far different from the ideology Speer tries to represent in the Haus der Kunst. Heirlooms reveal the loss of memory as a part of Holocaust violence. Perhaps the most significant of these scenes is Sebald's description of the looting of French homes, an operation so vast that it required employing the Paris Union of Furniture Removers.<sup>39</sup> This story told to Austerlitz through Henri Lemoine -- a

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<sup>38</sup>Didier Semin, *Christian Boltanski*, (London: Phaidon, 1997), 55.

librarian at the rue Richelieu, a vast library, which Austerlitz visits in an attempt to find his father but to no avail -- was a project that stole the memories contained in the heirlooms of some 40,000 families requiring 1500 men. This theft of memories occurs by removing generational objects from families, like the loss of identity because of Austerlitz's exile, the theft of photo albums, teacups, and furniture removes the referential objects that contain a family's history. These objects are like the photograph and letter that Austerlitz finds; their presence creates the capacity for a narration that goes beyond their functional presence. The vastness and brutality of these statistics are met with the real *punctum* of this violence, the Proustian (in its detailed list of a vast number of delicate objects) list of items taken from these individuals: "Louis XIV chests of drawers, Meissen porcelain, Persian rugs and whole libraries, down to the last saltcellar and peppermill."<sup>40</sup> The violence is not systematic killing and destruction, but rather the stealing of memory, through the destruction and robbery of family photographs, albums, and heirlooms whose value is held in the memories handed down from year to year. If a family photograph holds the ability to trigger memories that can narrate an entire family history, their destruction by the Nazi regime along with other heirlooms and valuables becomes just as violent of an act as a family member's death. The process of writing the dispersed memory of the text in family photos, stamps, forgotten diagrams, and letters becomes a profound countering of the violence of the destruction of memories. By writing these memories, the narrative attempts to recover the histories that were lost in the destruction of the Holocaust.

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<sup>39</sup>W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 288.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid*, 288.



Earlier in the novel Austerlitz recounts being told of SS attempts to create a festive atmosphere in the Warsaw ghettos to appease Red Cross investigators. He describes the concealment of the deportation procedures of the Nazis, revealing a narrative history that attempts to illuminate the gaps within a presumed official one. Austerlitz details to the narrator a vivid scene of a city transformed into a beautiful terrain of rose bushes, park benches, and merry-go-rounds. Internment camps were restored to their original luster converted back to ballrooms, all the while another 7,500 individuals were deported to certain death in concentration camps.<sup>41</sup> Sebald's writing exposes the ideology of the SS to show the ways in which they veil the actual relations, as well as the complicity that Red Cross investigators had in reacting to the conditions in Warsaw.<sup>42</sup> Sebald's rhetorical strategies in this passage are unique, like the passage of the furniture movers; Sebald reveals the small history residing as a trace within the large history.

Displacement, apparent in the photograph of Austerlitz as a young boy, is achieved through a different method in these two passages, using a categorical list. Sebald reveals in painstakingly precise detail a lengthy list of all the changes and their consequences executed in Warsaw. Rather than give a complete or narrativized history, Sebald reveals the archive in its precision and exhaustive listing. This passage represents the historical drive towards objectivity in its overwhelming lists of data, as White contends in "Historical Discourse and Literary Writing." Sebald attempts to represent historical writing and methodology, the transformation of the archive. Just as the reader is lead to think that Maximillian's witnessing of the Nazi rallies was an "eyewitness"

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<sup>41</sup>W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 242-245.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

account, Sebald undermines three pages of his own narrative, poignantly writing that the transformation of the Warsaw ghettos was witnessed through a Nazi propaganda film and reported to Austerlitz through his friend Adler, “given a sound track of Jewish folk music in March 1945 when a considerable number of people who had appeared in it were gone.”<sup>43</sup> By writing with the technique of a quasi-scientific history, Sebald shows the ways historical data is cuffed up into a narrative, in this case one that clearly conceals the material relations of brutality and deportation beneath the veneer of lush rose bushes and children playing in parks. Narrative history illuminates those things often lost in the gaps of official histories; items that by their destruction can no longer bear witness, and repress aspects of our memory.

Narrative in *Austerlitz* is surely an imaginary construction, but it speaks more about the difficulties inherent in witnessing and representing the Holocaust, than inscribed histories are able to. Its self-reflexive nature shows without ideologizing, the writing of the text does not rely upon the emotionally charged spectacle of violence within the concentration camps (as a film like *Schindler’s List* does).<sup>44</sup> Rather the beautiful family photograph or a small piece of porcelain used for special occasions holds a narrative on loss in a more touching way than the spectacular photography and cinema that attempts to represent the Holocaust does.

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<sup>43</sup>W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 244.

<sup>44</sup>Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* becomes ideologized in its desire to present to its viewers an image of the Holocaust that tried to convey what it would be like to live in a camp. The images rely on a litany of violence that can only result in the desensitization of the viewer. Furthermore, the film’s use of a few women as sexual objects, filmed in a stylized “Hollywood” representation, fall back upon traditional Hollywood narratives, making the story that much more puzzling. Conversely, films like Alain Resnais’s *Night and Fog*, which only portray shots of the camp in their present decay, use a reflexivity that avoids the ideologizing and sensationalized representations of violence in Spielberg’s film.

The bodily relation of death camp victims of *Austerlitz* allows the eyes of the resisters to address the viewers of the project in a way that a photograph of them on their way to a death camp would not be able to. This reproducible subject produces an indexical signifier of the destruction. The photographs in *Austerlitz* create random referents to those things the reader may not be able to see. The body may not be represented, but it is implied in its trace. Like Sebald, Boltanski, is able to refer to the violence of the Nazis without having to reproduce images of death. The images of the eyes as a reproducible source produce a tension within the images. This reference to the reproducibility of commodities in capitalism, invokes not only Marx, but also the Frankfurt school, whose members argue that capitalism produces the condition of isolation necessary to atomize society, allowing for the rise of totalitarian governments.<sup>45</sup> Capitalism's responsibility for the rise of Fascism produces an uneasy tension with Marxist resisters represented. By representing their mass production Boltanski shows the ways in which as resisters, their politics were totally betrayed by the rise of Fascism.

Two images at the end of *Austerlitz*, one of a cemetery bearing inscriptions in Hebrew juxtaposed on the next page with a view of a building possessing cement walls, a hazy chimney stack as steam billows forth with rows of barbed wire snaking through its foreground (fig. 6). Despite the reader's expectation that the cemetery is filled with individuals who died in the Holocaust and the belief that image of the building with its institution like setting and barbed wire is presumed to be a concentration camp, we are left in the dark about the actual graves in the cemetery. Sebald tells us it is a cemetery

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<sup>45</sup>This is most visible in the work of psychoanalyst Erich Fromm, who as a brief member of the Frankfurt School felt that capitalism, by forcing the mediation of all relations through commodity structure (reification), made individuals increasingly isolated from one another. See Erich Fromm, *Escape From Freedom*, (New York: Owl Books, 1941).

that Austerlitz passed through in Alderny street, and the building is surprisingly the hotel in which the narrator stays in Antwerp taking the reader full circle back to the Nocturama in which the narrator passes through stricken by the eyes of the owls he sees there, just before he takes us through the story of Austerlitz. While the text resurrects forgotten histories, it plays with the individual's expectations, reminding the reader that the novel is not a Holocaust narrative in the strict sense that it is going to narrate an individual's experience in a concentration camp; the Holocaust's presence is implied but lost. What the text offers is a nuanced tale of forgotten histories within a dominant narrative like the Holocaust. This not only allows for the construction of personal memories as histories, but it also allows Sebald to play with our expectations of what history is, undermining the truthfulness that photography purports to have.

These photographs have a smoky or cloudy condition to them, one the site of death, which is for Barthes the structure of photography, and the other a site of sleep confuse us giving us no clear sense of their origin. This lack of origin, perhaps intentionally silent over its referent can contextualize the union between Barthes and White, Boltanski and Sebald. Removing the context around the narrative is the exact opposite of the history, and its eyewitness narrative, we do not know the thing that has been there. Barthes reminds us of the photograph's insistence on representing the eyewitness, which becomes crucial for White, as this becomes the way in which history is transformed from archive to narrative. What Sebald and Boltanski give us are fine examples of social commentary reflecting not only Barthes's thinking on the photograph and the literary structure of history, but a history that forgets. In the play between official history and small memory, we are left with a group of images that get left behind, stolen,

removed from the archive in the name of nationalism, violence or terror. Resurrecting these memories, largely through fiction, Sebald and Boltanski, reveal the difficult and often overlapping structures of literature and history and remembering and forgetting. Writing from the literary, both Boltanski and Sebald remind us of the social and political in Barthes and White, that to speak and to write is done to remember, but in doing so it carries with it an inevitable degree of forgetting. This forgetting is at once destructive, removing important histories from dominant narratives, but fertile, creating a terrain for the small memory to be built.

Figures.

Fig. 1. Christian Boltanski. *Resistance*. (1993).

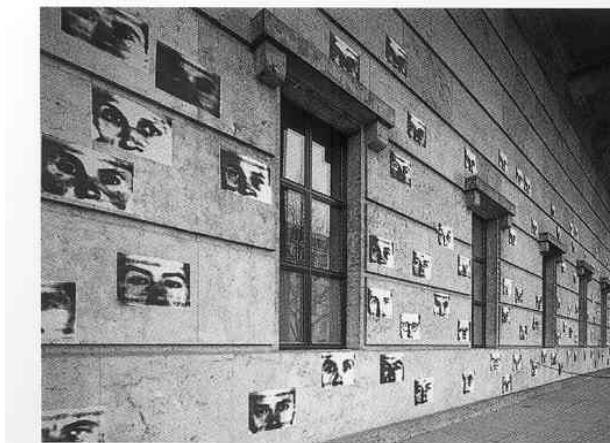


Fig. 2. Image from *Austerlitz*.



Fig. 3. Images from *Austerlitz*.

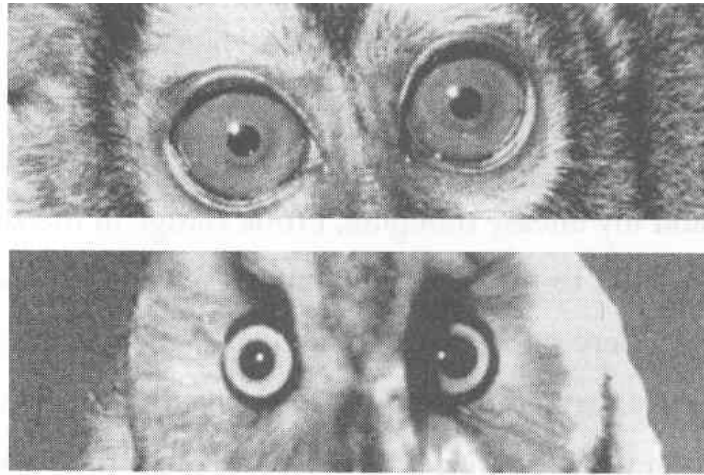




Fig. 4. Alexander Gardner. *Lewis Payne*. (1865). Reproduced in *Camera Lucida*.

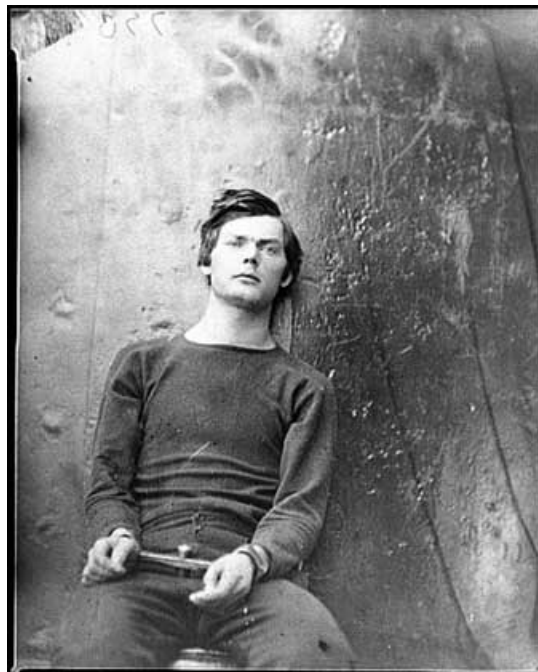




Fig. 5. Image from *Austerlitz*.

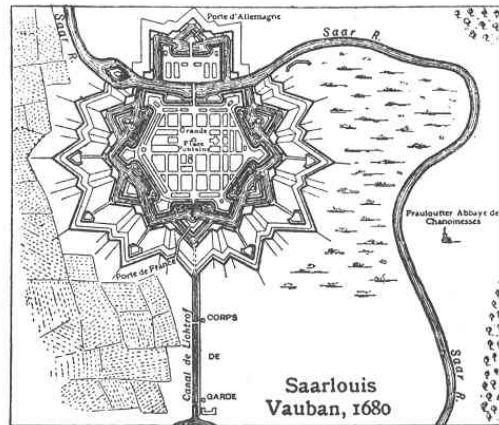
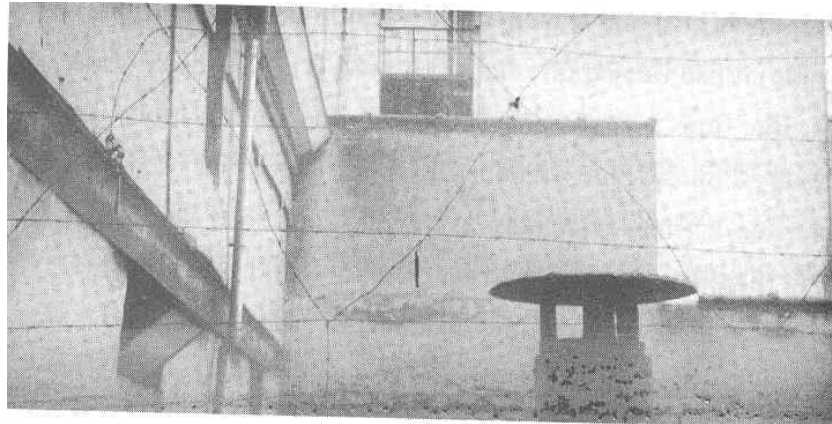


Fig. 6. Images from *Austerlitz*.





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